

Is it true that Israel stole Palestinian land?

Accusation: Israel stole Palestinian land to build a Jewish State

[the Muslim Brotherhood will] continue to view the Jews and Zionists as their first and foremost enemies ... Jihad means making sacrifices in order to restore what has been stolen [Palestine].

– Mohamed Badie, Supreme Leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, January 2010

Fact or fiction: Jews stole Palestinian land before 1948

From the beginning of World War 1 Arabs were claiming Jews stole Palestinian land and displaced them. However, the majority of the land in this region was owned by the Ottoman Empire (subsequently the British) and absentee landlords who lived in Cairo, Damascus and Beirut. During this period 80 percent of the Palestinian Arabs were impoverished peasants, semi-nomads and Bedouins... not wealthy landowners.¹

The region was severely underpopulated which meant the Jews were able to avoid buying land in areas where Arabs might be displaced, which they did. They sought land that was largely uncultivated, swampy, sandy, and most importantly, without tenants. In 1920, David Ben-Gurion expressed his concern about the Arab fellaheen (peasants), whom he viewed as *“the most important asset of the native population”* he said *“under no circumstances must we touch land belonging to fellahs or worked by them”*. He advocated helping liberate them from their oppressors. *“Only if a fellah leaves his place of settlement,”* Ben-Gurion added, *“should we offer to buy his land, at an appropriate price.”*²

The Jews overpaid for land they purchase

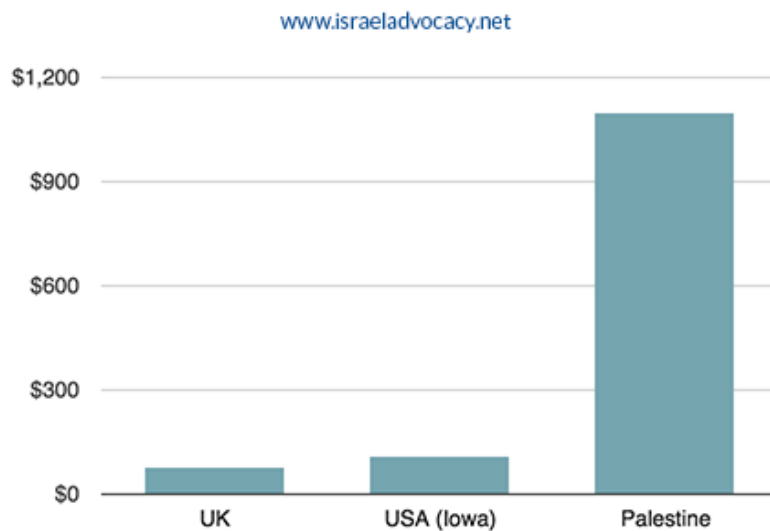
When British MP John Hope Simpson arrived in Palestine in May 1930 to report on Arab-Jewish violence and discovered the Jews were purchasing land at exorbitant rates: *“They [Jews] paid high prices for the land, and in addition they paid to certain of the occupants of those lands a considerable amount of money which they were not legally bound to pay.”*³

resources or training needed to develop the land. Moreover, the Commission found the shortage was “due less to the amount of land acquired by Jews than to the increase in the Arab population”. The report concluded that the presence of Jews in Palestine, along with the work of the British Administration, had resulted in higher wages, an improved standard of living and ample employment opportunities.⁴

It is made quite clear to all, both by the map drawn up by the Simpson Commission and by another compiled by the Peel Commission, that the Arabs are as prodigal in selling their land as they are in useless wailing and weeping

— Transjordan’s King Abdullah, My Memoirs Completed, p88-89

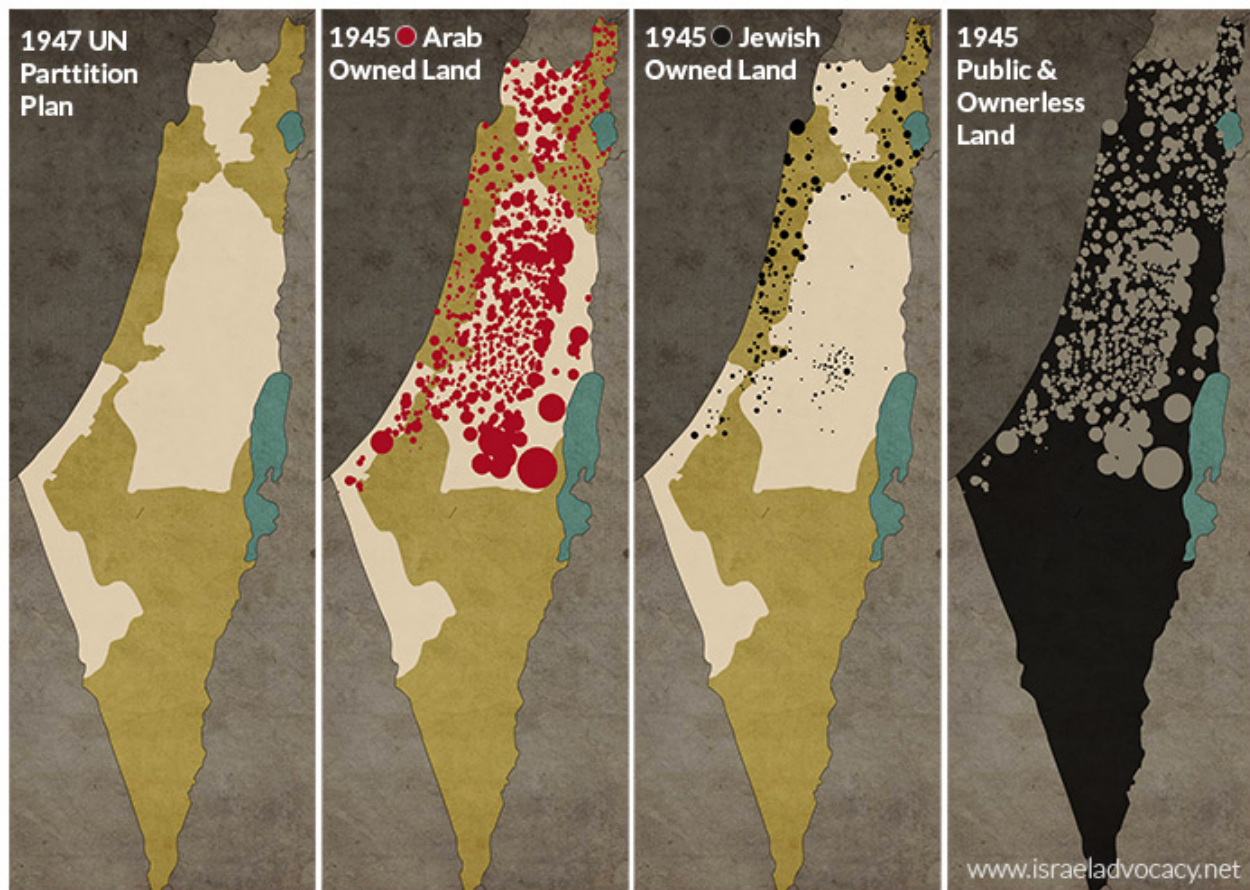
As the violence escalated Arabs continued to sell land to Jews at outrageous prices, usually for tiny tracts of arid land. *“In 1944, Jews paid between \$1,000 and \$1,100 per acre in Palestine, mostly for arid or semiarid land; in the same year, rich black soil in Iowa was selling for about \$110 per acre.”*⁵



Average price of an acre of arable land in 1944

Land ownership from 1945-1947

In 1945 the British commissioned a survey of land ownership in Mandatory Palestine for the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine. This survey was the research that the UN relied upon when suggesting how the region could be partitioned. The illustration below is a



The UN proposed the Arab State would include areas where Arabs owned most of the land, while the Jewish State would contain the sizeable Jewish communities. The black expanse in the last map shows how the land allocated to Israel was largely ownerless (as it was uninhabitable desert or swamp land).

By 1947, Jewish holdings in Palestine amounted to about 463,000 acres. Approximately 45,000 of these acres were acquired from the Mandatory Government; 30,000 were bought from various churches and 387,500 were purchased from Arabs. Analyses of land purchases from 1880 to 1948 show that 73 percent of Jewish plots were purchased from large landowners, not poor fellahin.⁷ Those who sold land included the mayors of Gaza, Jerusalem and Jaffa. As'ad el-Shuqeiri, a Muslim religious scholar and father of PLO chairman Ahmed Shuqeiri, took Jewish money for his land. Even King Abdullah leased land to the Jews. In fact, many leaders of the Arab nationalist movement, including members of the Muslim Supreme Council, sold land to Jews.⁸

Fact or fiction: Israel stole Palestinian land in the 1948 war?

By some miracle, the Jews repelled the invaders and in defeating the Arab armies captured more land than that allotted in the UN partition. Much of this land had sizable Jewish populations and much more defensible borders. Israel took the decision to retain this land to assure the safety of its citizens. It is this new border that most people refer to when they speak of the Pre-67 Lines (or the 49 Armistice Lines).

The Arabs also captured land. Egyptians conquered Gaza, while the Jordanians usurped the West Bank. Unlike Israel, this was not for the safety of their citizens, but to increase their own territory. By the end of the war, according to Morris, the *“Arab war Plan changed . . . into a multinational land grab focusing on the Arab areas of the country. The evolving Arab ‘plans’ failed to assign any of these whatsoever to the Palestinians or to consider their political aspirations.”*¹⁰

Fact or fiction: Israel stole Palestinian after 1948?

While Arab leaders boasted “strike the enemy’s settlements, turn them into dust, pave the Arab roads with the skulls of Jews”,¹¹ their genocidal intentions were repeatedly crushed, often leaving Israel with even greater territory. Despite these gains, Israel had no intention of keeping the land – it always intended to return the land in exchange for peace.

In 1974 Israel returned territories to Syria that it had captured 1967 and 1973. Again in 1979 they returned the entire Sinai Peninsula, a mass of land rich in oil, with Jewish settlements and three times the size of pre-67 Israel.

In September 1983, Israel withdrew from large areas of Lebanon to positions south of the Awali River. In 1985, it completed its withdrawal from Lebanon, except for a narrow security zone just north of the Israeli border. That too was abandoned, unilaterally, in 2000.

After signing peace agreements with the Palestinians, and a treaty with Jordan, Israel agreed to withdraw from most of the territory in the West Bank captured from Jordan in 1967. A small area was returned to Jordan, and more than 40 percent was ceded to the Palestinian Authority.

Finally in 2005, all Israeli troops and civilians were evacuated from the Gaza Strip and the territory was turned over to the control of the Palestinian Authority. In addition, four communities in the West Bank that covered an area larger than the entire Gaza Strip were also evacuated as part of the disengagement plan. As a result, Israel has now withdrawn from approximately 94 percent of the territory it captured in 1967.



Israel has captured territory from those that wage war against the tiny state, but each time it returns the land in a heartbeat in exchange for peace.

decades when Jordan ethnically cleansed Jews from the region between 1948 to 1967. When Israel captured the territory from the Jordanians, following Jordan's attack on Israel in the combined Arab attack of 67, Israel allowed Jews to move back to some select locations.

Numerous experts in international law believe that these settlements are not illegal. Stephen Schwebel, formerly President of the International Court of Justice, notes that a country acting in self defence may seize and occupy territory when necessary to protect itself. Schwebel also observes that a state may require, as a condition for its withdrawal, security measures designed to ensure its citizens are not menaced again from that territory.¹² In the seventies Israel made thousands of its citizens homeless when it returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, it did so on the condition Egypt would make peace with the Jewish State – just as Schwebel described.

When Israel constructs its settlements it does not requisition private land for their establishment. Housing construction is only permitted on private land where the rights of others have not been violated. The vast majority of settlements have been built in uninhabited areas and even the handful established in or near Arab towns did not displace or steal land. In instances where it had been that settlements had been built on stolen land, the previous Arab owners took their case to the Supreme Israeli Court which ruled the settlements needed to be dismantled.

Jewish settlements

In the images below we can see Jewish settlements built in uninhabited areas, this was the pattern for the overwhelming majority of West Bank settlements.





Arab settlements

What many people do not realise is that the majority of Palestinian urban areas are in fact modern settlements that did not exist a century ago.



Silwan, Jerusalem 19th



Silwan, Jerusalem 2013

www.israeladvocacy.net



In 1914 Jews were the largest population in Jerusalem. The east / west division did not exist, it was created later by the 1948 war. The images above show there was barely an Arab living outside the old city walls. East Jerusalem is a modern Arab settlement.

Summary

- The claim that Jews stole Palestinian land is a lie.
- The UN proposal awarded the land where Jewish ownership was high to Israel and where Arab ownership was high to a future Palestinian state
- Jews massively overpaid for the land they acquired

- Did Israel get all of the good land?
- Did America create Israel?
- Is it true that Israel stole Palestinian land?
- Was there ever a Palestinian people?
- Was there ever a country called Palestine?
- Was the Zionist movement a plot to colonise the Middle East?
- Were the Jews unwilling to share Palestine?
- Was the UN Partition Plan unfair to the Palestinian majority?
- Are Israel's borders expanding?
- Is it true that Britain created Israel?
- Why should the Palestinians pay for Europe's wrongs during the Holocaust?

Sources

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3. Hope Simpson Report, p. 51
4. Palestine Royal Commission Report (1937)
5. Moshe Aumann, Land Ownership in Palestine 1880–1948, (Jerusalem: Academic Committee on the Middle East, 1976), p13
6. [Spreadsheet which contains village statistics](#)
7. Abraham Granott, The Land System in Palestine, (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952), p. 278
8. Avneri, pp. 179–180, 224–225, 232–234; Porath (77), pp. 72–73; See also Hillel Cohen, Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008).
9. Quoted in “Myths and facts 1982; a Concise Record of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Leonard J. Davis and M. Decter, p199”
10. Righteous Victims, Benny Morris, p221
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12. American Journal of International Law, (April, 1970), pp. 345–46.

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